

How might we attract more professionals to a career in the resources sector?

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Ben Fitzsimmons MAusIMM
Media and Community, Hume Coal

The mining industry is a marvellously challenging industry that provides professionals the opportunity to travel the globe and manage some of the world's largest machinery in and amongst amazing feats of engineering and design. Unfortunately, the ups and downs of the mining sector are so widely publicised with stories of sharp job losses and negative impacts on communities and the environment. These stories inundate students and young professionals and shadow the wonderful achievements of the mining industry.

It is imperative that those working in the industry become a voice for mining, loudly promoting the benefits and the enormous and often world-leading advancements in automation, innovation and technology. It is our responsibility to encourage students to follow a career in mining whilst preparing them for an industry that will continue to cycle through boom and bust. Both the industry and the educators must emphasise the importance of personal resilience and empower our young professionals to not only think, but believe that they will make a difference in their roles.

Our industry also has a responsibility to encourage a more diverse workforce. I believe that this will be achieved by exposing high school students to our highly advanced industry that will in turn inspire young men and women to pursue STEM subjects and ultimately a career in an industry that is no longer dirty and laborious, rather an innovative and global industry where the opportunities are endless.



Dr Cherie McCullough MAusIMM(CP)
Director, Principal Environmental Scientist, Mine Lakes Consulting

The cyclic nature of the industry has always, and no doubt will continue, to contribute to staff being lost to other industries during the downturn; and then are often reluctant (or unable) to return to the resources industry when opportunities again present themselves. Ensuring staff without direct mining experience or whom have had a hiatus from the industry can re-enter the workforce mitigates these downturn staffing losses. For example, through bridging training and even simply greater awareness of what different skills and perspectives these people can bring.

Diversity is a challenge particularly for younger professionals with higher expectations from their workplaces than previous generations may have had. Acceptance of differences in gender, race and sexuality is an important consideration still to be fully embraced by the sector. Active engagement with industry benchmarks and provision of training and advice facilitated by external advisors are innovations that can break old hiring and management habits that have been shown to benefit other industries.

Women generally have a lower representation in STEM qualifications and experiences increasing the difficulty of them then being able to secure resource employment in technical positions. Greater representation and mentorship from established professionals and support from industry companies can help here. Similarly, flexible working conditions that accommodate family and carer responsibilities as well as actively reducing the career impact of family leave for both genders would encourage professionals to stay in the sector.



Louisa O'Connor MAusIMM(CP)
Principal Geometallurgist, CSA Global

Working in the resources industry can be extremely exciting, rewarding and challenging. The public perception that the industry is simply about using explosives and moving ore on trucks is changing. The resources sector is highly technical, extremely innovative and utilises many disciplines and experiences. Whilst there are 'traditional' skills and roles in this industry, such as geologists, metallurgists and engineers, there are new skill requirements for these roles as well as newer discipline areas. For example, business and a level of financial understanding and project management are somewhat expected. Mechatronics, automation and robotics, intensive computational programming, mathematicians and statisticians are paramount for the development for future mine value chains.

Attracting professionals into this area starts with education and marketing. Outreach programs, collaboration between media, industry, State and Federal governments; working directly with schools and universities to create a cohesive and focused approach in highlighting employment opportunities is essential. Investment and strong leadership by all stakeholders, dedicating resources to this initiative is imperative.

Remuneration in the industry is rarely questioned, but it may no longer be an incentive for some. There are differences in attitude between generations that will require further innovation to bring mining to the cities as working remotely to many is simply not something they will do. This creates a circular situation.



Stuart Emery MAusIMM
Regional Technical Manager, Asia-Pacific, Solvay

I think the answer lies in increasing the knowledge of the industry in the general public. If high school students looking for a career path, or university students looking for a speciality don't know what the mining industry has to offer, then they are not likely to choose this as an option. This would equally apply to already qualified professionals choosing mining over another industry.

I come from South Australia, where most people don't know what a metallurgist is, and I discovered a degree in mineral processing by accident. This was at a time of industry downturn in the early 2000s and student numbers in mining courses were dwindling. At the time, I assisted the university staff with some school visits and mail-outs, with the simple aim of increasing awareness that the mining courses existed. This was very successful, with the number of students choosing mineral processing as their first preference increasing dramatically.

Unfortunately, the University of South Australia stopped offering mining courses shortly afterwards, but we felt that we tried hard to give them a fighting chance.